

PRICE TAGS

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False Creek as it might have been



Warren Gill (SFU's VP, University Relations) came across this remarkable rendering stuffed away in the Vancouver Museum.

It reveals what Marathon Realty, the CPR's real-estate arm, was proposing for the North Shore of False Creek about 1970. Above is the Yaletown portion, roughly at the foot of Davie Street (with no sign of the Roundhouse or any vestige of industry - or, for that matter, a single car).

Here's the complete panorama:



There's a mystery involved. Who did this – and for what?

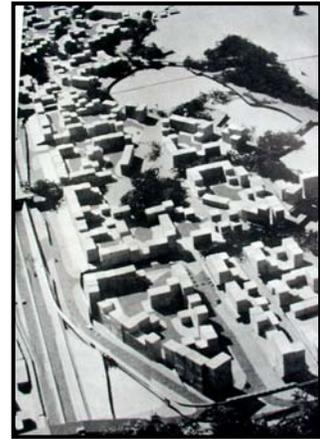
The artist's name is J. Veerman. But did he come up with the architecture and site plan on his own, or was he basing this painting on someone else's vision? And who might that be?

Some History

In the late 1960s, Tom Campbell was Mayor and the NPA still dominated Council. But Walter Hardwick of TEAM was given a mandate to negotiate with the CPR for an exchange of land around

False Creek. The CPR ended up consolidating its holdings on the North Shore; the City gained control of the South Shore. The future of the basin was now up for grabs.

The Board of Trade had already released a report in 1968 calling for “a radical departure from neatly separated land uses ...” That same year, UBC Architecture professor Wolfgang Gerson led a studio of students who produced a model of a residential False Creek surrounded by little cedar cubes of Habitat-like housing .



In 1970, the City announced that it would allow all industrial leases to expire, and the Planning Department released a report on *False Creek Development Concepts* that even included a residential Granville Island.

Clearly Marathon was positioning itself to take advantage of an opportunity to build a massive residential and commercial project on the North Shore of False Creek.

Our best guess is that the proposal in the rendering was released in 1971. The TD Tower (1969) is there, but Eatons looks slightly different. The Royal Centre (1971) is faithfully sketched out, but Vancouver Centre’s Scotia Tower (1974) is a fanciful suggestion. (And that’s the S.S. Canberra in the background.)



[There are other projects included that we’ll explore in future Price Tags.]

Veerman's vision of a modernistic megaproject is seemingly more inspired by Toronto's Harbourfront or Chicago's Marina City than anything sympathetic to Vancouver. It seems to have disappeared, to be replaced in 1974 by a lightly sketched, hand-lettered pamphlet that emphasized leafy public squares and vibrant streets.

In the mid-1970s, the City of Vancouver used its resources to build an almost-Utopian version of the city in nature on the South Shore. Marathon's proposal went nowhere. They sold their lands to the Province, which in the early 1980s built B.C. Place stadium as the first element in a megaproject that seems to have been inspired at least in part by this previous vision.

It too went nowhere. Expo '86 took place instead, the site was cleared, the land sold off to Li Ka-shing, and the City began to exercise its planning controls to shape what became Concord Pacific Place.

A closer look at Veerman's rendering suggests that some of the concepts first proposed eventually found their way into the final plan. The architecture may have changed, thank god, but the massing and concepts were reinterpreted, the park space expanded, and, combined with the 1974 vision and the B.C. Place plan, produced something rather like we have today.

Okay, faithful PT readers – your turn. If you can solve the mystery or add further references, send them along to price@novus-tele.net.